



South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series)

By Robert Mshengu Kavanagh

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South African People's Plays consists of four plays that were seminal in the development and performance of majority theatre in South Africa during the apartheid period.

The first is a profoundly creative and ground-breaking piece of theatre by Credo Vusamazulu Mutwa - see his "Indaba, My Children" and "Africa, My Witness" - called "uNosilimela". With music and much interaction between the human and the spiritual world, this fable tells the story of uNosilimela (named after the isiLimela constellation of stars) who is the love child of a princess from the stars and a contemporary Zulu inkosi (king/chief). Through uNosilimela's picaresque adventures Mutwa projects a panorama of the life and culture of the black people not only of South Africa but Africa itself. His attempt to recreate what he considered to be a pre-colonial form of performance staging, in itself ensured for the play the important place it occupies in the development of majority theatre in South Africa.

The second of the four is probably the archetypal example of the art and drama of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa, a movement which played a key role in the conscientisation of black people, especially the young, in the years leading up to the Soweto Uprising of 16th June, 1976. Mthuli Shezi, the author of the play, was vice-President of the Black People's Convention. During an altercation with a racist railway policeman at a railway station not far from Johannesburg, he was pushed onto the rails in the path of an oncoming train and died of his injuries. The play featured the political engagement and love of Thabo and Shanti, a South African of Indian descent. It underscored the concept of black solidarity between the races oppressed by apartheid racism.

The third is the only published script of that colossus of black theatre, music and dance in the years between 1964 and 1994, the prolific and immensely popular theatre entrepreneur, Gibson Mtutuzeli Kente. [See Rolf Solberg's recent publication: "Bra Gib: the Father of Township Theatre"]. The play featured in this collection is "Too Late" (1975), in which Kente prophetically warns 'the powers that be' to do something before it is 'too late'. His prophecy proved

accurate when the students all over the country rose up in defiance of Bantu Education and the apartheid system, an uprising which played a major part in bringing in democracy in 1994.

The last is a play by the influential Experimental Theatre Workshop '71 (Workshop '71), "Survival". The four characters who present the play are jailbirds and the central metaphor is that of prison. Through innovative 'workshop theatre' techniques, images, dance and song they demonstrate that apartheid society was in itself a prison and that therefore the real prison was simply a prison within a prison. The play was very powerful in performance and after sold-out performances in Cape Town and Johannesburg, toured on the West Coast of the USA with a run in an off-Broadway theatre in New York.

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Editorial Review

From the Back Cover

Fanon, Cabral, Freire and others have insisted on the importance of culture in the struggle to liberate the peoples of the Third World. In South Africa in 1976 the people's theatre was an essential part of this cultural resistance, which ultimately became a political movement in itself.

In this collection there are four plays, the products not of an academic literary tradition but of struggle. Two of the plays, *Too Late* and *Survival*, were banned and *Shanti* was cited in the charge sheet at the SASO/BPC [South African Students Organisation/Black People's Convention] trial of 1975-6. Though one or two of the plays were performed before whites and the [black] 'elite', all were aimed at popular audiences in Soweto and other black ghettos. Their strength lies in performance and the political and cultural function that they fulfil. This collection attempts to give the reader some understanding of what these performances meant in South Africa herself. Introductory notes describe the context, meaning and stage history of each play and offer suggestions about how each might be performed.

Cover photograph courtesy of S'ketsh' [Johannesburg].

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Billie Duran:

Do you have favorite book? For those who have, what is your favorite's book? Reserve is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each book has different aim or maybe goal; it means that guide has different type. Some people really feel enjoy to spend their a chance to read a book. They may be reading whatever they consider because their hobby will be reading a book. What about the person who don't like reading a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book when they found difficult problem or maybe exercise. Well, probably you will require this South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series).

Marc Gaul:

People live in this new time of lifestyle always make an effort to and must have the extra time or they will get large amount of stress from both day to day life and work. So , if we ask do people have spare time, we will say absolutely of course. People is human not a robot. Then we consult again, what kind of activity do you have when the spare time coming to you of course your answer can unlimited right. Then ever try this one, reading textbooks. It can be your alternative with spending your spare time, the book you have read will be South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series).

Ines Patterson:

Reading can called head hangout, why? Because if you are reading a book specially book entitled South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series) your mind will drift away trough every dimension, wandering in most aspect that maybe mysterious for but surely will become your mind friends. Imaging every word written in a book then become one type conclusion and explanation that will maybe you never get ahead of. The South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series) giving you an additional experience more than blown away the mind but also giving you useful facts for your better life on this era. So now let us present to you the relaxing pattern at this point is your body and mind will probably be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a sport. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Nicole Norris:

As a pupil exactly feel bored for you to reading. If their teacher questioned them to go to the library or to make summary for some reserve, they are complained. Just little students that has reading's heart or real their leisure activity. They just do what the educator want, like asked to the library. They go to at this time there but nothing reading really. Any students feel that reading through is not important, boring and can't see colorful photographs on there. Yeah, it is to get complicated. Book is very important to suit your needs. As we know that on this period of time, many ways to get whatever we would like. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. So , this South African People's Plays: Ons Phola Hi (African Writers Series) can make you really feel more interested to read.

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